

Moses 14 Sinai and beyond

Leviticus 18:2-5

Taking God seriously – very seriously

You can probably name the 10 commandments. But can you name the 613? (365 prohibitive – days in a year + 248 mandates corresponding to the number of bones in a human body.)

The purpose of the law, the Torah, was to help the children of God realise they were a lot more than ex-slaves of Egypt, more than a band of runaway slaves were. They were the people of God, and they needed to learn after generations in a culture and society that had many gods that there was really only one God and he was their God, on their side.

It had all begun with Jacob's family fleeing drought and stories of the past, of great ancestors Joseph, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would seem like ancient history, a myth maybe to many in this generation. The saviours of Egypt had over time become the slaves of Egypt.

Egyptian culture had permeated their thinking. They knew about Egyptian gods, Egyptian cooking, Egyptian bank holidays and feast days. Education was Egyptian and all they really knew for certain was that Pharaoh was their master and his word was law. In most respects the average Hebrew was a second-class Egyptian pagan.

The Hebrews had left Egypt and the bridge back over the Nile was down, forever, but Egypt was not out of the Hebrews. They needed to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, not just transplanted from Egypt to Canaan.

Things were now very different. They had to learn to take their God seriously. To give him priority over everything else in life.

You shall have NO OTHER GODS before me says commandment number 1 – God is your priority, your number 1.

Jesus said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God.” Put God and what he wants first.

If we fear God, put him in the right place in our lives then everything else will fit into place.

Moses was up the mountain with God for weeks and he received a number of positive suggestions on how the people may like to conduct themselves from now on. RUBBISH! These were commandments, and breaking commandments had consequences.

Everything begins with God (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1) “I am your God and you are to take me very seriously. I am in first place, and there is no second place, I am priority number one.”

God did not want the Hebrews to be a sort of transplanted Egypt in Canaan. God did not want the Hebrews to absorb the fashions, culture, languages and religion of Canaan. They were NOT refugees looking for somewhere to settle in peace and prosperity. They were God's people going to THEIR land, then occupied by tenants who had no right to the land.

But we must also note the protection afforded in God's law for real aliens and refugees. Whether visitors, slaves, traders or refugees, the law protected all, justice was for all in God's Kingdom.

The Hebrews were to be God's people, celebrating God's feasts, obeying His laws, enjoying a relationship through worship with Him, and becoming His hope for the whole world, as examples and messengers of God. He was to make them a nation and take them home, he was going to teach them government and give them laws, and he was to teach them the correct way to worship and make them a distinctive people.

Once the tabernacle was built and completed adhering strictly to God's very detailed design brief (a year after Passover), God occupied the Holy of Holies for about 50 days (Exodus 40:17; Numbers 1:1; 10:11) before letting the people move on. It took that long for God to give them the basics to being the people of Israel.

I have wanted to study the Torah, the law of God for more than a decade, and now I want to try and summarise it in 15 minutes!

Exodus

Is a history book, but the second half is an introduction to Gods legislation. The Hebrews have been led right back to the very place Moses first received his commission from God, and in obedience he has brought the people there, for they were now to be commissioned to obey God, follow His laws and be a holy nation. Beginning with the basics of the moral law (10 commandments), Exodus continues with an introduction to civil, social and ceremonial law; ending in particular the design of the Tabernacle, the portable place of worship where God would physically dwell with his people.

Leviticus

Literally “pertaining to the Levites”.

The Levites are commissioned by God to lead the worship of God’s people and be their priests. The first 10 chapters deal with the way to worship God through the various offerings.

The second half of Leviticus deals with how to live in holiness in everyday life, covering everything from personal hygiene, soil conservation, family life, and how to maintain a national distinctiveness (that was to be so important in times of exile).

It was all about how the infinite God would allow finite man to approach him. Israel was unique. God told them how to approach their holy God.

All other religions have to guess and formulate ways they think they might be able to appease their gods. The demons behind them are so fickle they could never be sure what would work!

God says, "It's My way, not your way. I am holy, you are not. Therefore you will approach me in the manner I require. Worship and reverence are non-negotiable."

We must come to God on his terms. Evidence for example the 3000 who died following the incident to of the Golden calf.

Leviticus teaches that God does not want just Sunday Christians. The lives of believers are to be holy acts of worship. The Biblical feasts of the Lord are laid out, times of joy, accompanied by singing, music, dancing, elaborate meals and specific sacrifices - including the Jubilee which we will look at next week.

Numbers

The first 10 chapters of Numbers not only records a census, but covers the way God wanted his people organised in the camp.

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy means “repetition of the law” and is based around three farewell addresses given by and recorded by Moses. Along with some history this book repeats the Ten Commandments along with other ceremonial and governmental regulations.

Conclusion

1. God must occupy first place in our lives in no less a way than he required of the Hebrews. When God takes priority number one we may be seen to behave differently to “everybody else”. Paul set up the significant church at Ephesus. It was a mission base for the whole of Asia Minor. It had Timothy become its Pastor. The church endured persecution, martyrdom and deception from false teachers. Good deeds abounded, the saints persevered, the congregation grew, but within a generation John was led to write from Patmos “ You have left your first love”. We need to seek first God’s will. It’s not a matter of keeping up with the Cohens.
2. God’s word is still final. We are not to run our lives or churches on how we feel or to consider first our opinions. There is a place to be relevant to the culture of the people we live with but God’s word must have the first and final say in all matters, even if we end up

branded as old fashioned and outdated dinosaurs.

3. Worship is not entertainment. It is to make God happy, and if we enjoy it as well that is a bonus. Tuesday - What does it mean to make a sacrifice of praise? (*Westminster Confession – “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever” John Piper writes “The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever” How can we enjoy and celebrate the presence of God?*)